

The New Jersey Shore...

BEAUTY and the BEACH

CREDIT Franklin P. Stoy, mayor of Atlantic City in 1902, with more chivalry than public relations sense. Mayor Stoy stood by while the Floral Parade rolled along the Boardwalk on the first of August of that year watching the pageant of rolling chairs, in each of which sat a beautiful girl.

"Mayor," said the inevitable bystander, "we ought to choose the prettiest girl."

"Absolutely not," replied the mayor so firmly gallant that his words are remembered down through the years. "We are going to judge pretty chairs. ALL the girls are pretty. Who would dare to pick out one?"

That reluctance to choose but one has vanished with the passing years. Today, as one writer has put it, the New Jersey Shore "crowns more royalty than Europe." There is a Queen

This is the 13th of a series of articles on the New Jersey Shore. Next Week: The Re-awakening of Spring.

of This and a Queen of That, there are baby queens and college queens and big grown-up queens. Atlantic City each year dares to choose the prettiest of them all and to call her Miss America.

OCCASIONALLY a king is crowned, too—say a Marble King at Asbury Park or a Baby Parade King at Wildwood or Ocean City—but the New Jersey Shore's royalty is essentially female. There is ample reason above and beyond gallantry: The Queen of This or the Queen of That commands almost as much Page One newspaper space as the atom bomb.

If the Queen—of Fishhooks, of Clam Boats, of Seaweed, of Sand—gets on the Front Page, the caption under the picture will mention Asbury Park or Wildwood or Ocean City or Cape May. Someone in Dubuque or Iowa City or Memphis might thus be tempted to expend a few dollars by New Jersey's rolling waves.

Possibly that sounds crass. Nevertheless, if the Miss America Pageant hadn't lured extra customers to Atlantic City it would stand as much chance of existing as snow on the Boardwalk. Beauty and the beach, for purposes of promotion, are vital to the New Jersey Shore.

Promotion can and does take forms above and beyond beauty pageants. Each season a bewildering array of special events is presented by the state's 55 seaside resorts—band concerts, marble tourneys, fashion shows, clam-opening contests, flower festivals, fishing contests, baby parades, and on through a long list.

A single season, according to one commentator on the current scene, brings enough floats to the board-



Current "Queen" of the Atlantic City Pageant and 29th Miss America in line of succession is Miss Marian McKnight of Manning, S. C. Vital statistics: 5 feet 5, 120 pounds, 35-23-35.

Beauty Pageants and Baby Parades Climax a Busy Season of Special Events Including Flower Festivals and Clam Shucking Contests Which Supplement Shore's Natural Attractions

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

walks between Atlantic Highlands and Cape May "to supply the Philadelphia Mummers Parades, the New Orleans Mardi Gras and Pasadena's Tournament of Roses for a decade."

Promotion nourishes the seaside resorts, particularly in these days when hundreds of other areas vie with New Jersey's sand and waves to win the tourist's favor (and his cash). Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent each year to keep the public informed of the merits of the state's coastal resorts.

The money comes from many sources—from hotel owners, from boardwalk entrepreneurs, from city budgets, all augmented with a tiny slice from the state budget. The cash goes for many things—for brightly colored and eternally optimistic folders, for advertisements in newspapers and magazines, for publicity staffs, for representatives traveling the country seeking to lure conventions shoreward and for beauty contests.

Great grandmother of all promotional schemes involving the young

lady of evident capability is the Miss America Pageant, started in 1921 and this year about to crown the 30th Miss America. Although lapsed several times because of financial crises, inept management and lack of interest, the Pageant nevertheless survives as the classic of all pulchritudinal coronations.

BEAUTY contests everywhere recognize the debt to Atlantic City's success in getting Miss America (and Atlantic City) in the public prints. Today an estimated 25,000 "queens" are selected in America each year, most of them satisfied with such titles as Miss Vegetable Queen, Miss National, Chemical Week, Miss Florida Oranges—and as the ultimate in something, a Miss Onion Queen.

Atlantic City didn't invent the use of beauty to advance a cause. The first official beauty queen (not counting Helen of Troy and that crowd) probably was one Miss Myrtle Meriwether of Shinglehouse, Pa., crowned Miss Rehoboth Beach, Del., in 1880. Miss Meriwether became queen by accident; she was in Rehoboth Beach attending a convention of business women and entered the contest without even the formality of first being Miss Shinglehouse, Pa.

That beauty queen notion didn't catch on quickly, despite the fact that up and down the New Jersey Shore promotion men began to flex the huge muscles they someday would possess. Hotels and railroads advertised widely—without so much as a pretty face or a well-turned ankle gracing their ads to appeal to the yokels.

Asbury Park pioneered the choice of royalty in 1890, when its nationally famed Baby Parade first rolled. Mayor Stoy's later reluctance to choose the prettiest grown-up female found no counterpart in Asbury Park; that resort made its choice in the baby field—and anyone knows that a doting mother scorned is far more dangerous than a grown-up female eliminated in a beauty contest.

THE BABY PARADE caught on rapidly. Within a decade virtually every state sent gaily decorated baby carriages and good-looking babies to the Park. Children and their parents filled hotels for a week or more, which meant the Parade fulfilled the fondest hopes of the sponsors.

Asbury Park added a mature queen in 1901—Queen Titania, a ruling beauty of each year, including movie actresses (notably Mary Pickford in 1915). The city proudly boasted in 1926: "No event in the United States, except the political conventions, gets more lineage in the papers." Baby—thy name is Promotion.

Festooned baby carriages stopped rolling through Asbury Park between

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New Jersey's only Miss America titleholder was Bette Cooper of Hackettstown (above), shown on runway after her "coronation." RIGHT: "Beauty Maids" of 1921 wear finest for Boardwalk appearance. Honor of being first Miss America went to Washington's Margaret Gorman at left.



Bathing beauties, circa 1921, promenading in the first Miss America Parade at Atlantic City.



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1932 and 1945—too much depression and war. Back bounced the Baby Parade in 1946, bigger and brighter than ever, but changed times killed the event in 1949. Through the years 5,000,000 people had watched the babes promenade through 45 parades.

The Baby Parade is far from dead, of course. There are those in Asbury Park who hope color TV might revive the city's prime promotion. Several other towns pick the prettiest babes in carriages. Ocean City and Wildwood each year continue their prominent baby parades — both of which, curiously enough, date to 1909 and prove that promotion minds often run in the same channel.

JUST so much newspaper mileage can be gotten out of pretty babies of the infant variety. The real gold mine is in pretty "babes" who've grown up to somewhere between 16 and 25 years of age and who are willing to match their qualities against those of their peers. The wonder is not that there are so many beauty contests but

that there are so few. Queens are sure-fire; flower festival promotions aren't worth a front page paragraph, for all the pleasure they might give thousands of people.

Thus, look closely to see how the Court of Miss America evolved. This is the fundamental story of beauty contests—and how passing years allegedly have made beauty no longer enough. Today brains and "talent" (much of it authentic) are said to be as important as the ability to round out a bathing suit, but don't let that fool you. Miss America is lovely first; brains and talent are happy extra dividends.

For all its promotional overtones, the Miss America Pageant is a handsomely staged show and its backers are sincere enough about the virtues of intelligence to have rounded up nearly \$1,500,000 in scholarships over the last 10 years. Miss Americas of

today ARE bright; bright enough to know that being Miss America is worth at least \$50,000 the first year.

It is entirely possible that the first Miss Americas had brain-filled heads on their lovely shoulders, too. No one asked. The Pageant in those days quite frankly stressed tape measurement appeal.

MOST historians credit Herb Test of the now-extinct Atlantic City Gazette-Review with fathering Miss America. It seems that the Gazette-Review's circulation manager in 1921 came home from a meeting in Reading, Pa., fired up by a circulation scheme. Several papers had decided to choose their town's most popular miss — and as a reward for her helping to boost circulation, to send her to Atlantic City for a week.

Herb Test listened with growing interest. "Since we'll have so many

pretty girls here all at once," mused Herb, "why don't we put them all in bathing suits and pick the best?"

They did just that. The "Beauty Maids" from Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Camden, Newark, Ocean City, Washington and New York donned bathing suits and joined hundreds of marchers in a boardwalk parade. Herb Test had worked enthusiasm to a fever pitch on the Tuesday and Wednesday following Labor Day. Atlantic City—the world, for that matter—had never seen the like.

Miss Margaret Gorman, Washington's "most popular," stepped forward to be acclaimed as the "most beautiful bathing girl in America." She dazzled the audience with her full-skirted black suit, dimpled knees peeping daringly above rolled-down stockings, and blonde curls caught in a bandanna. Miss Gorman, all of 16 years old, was Miss America Number One.



ABOVE: Present-day version of the Miss America Parade. Scene shows floats on Boardwalk.



LEFT: Beauties line up for official picture of group attired in bathing suits. This phase of pageant is most popular of all for photographers.

ATLANTIC CITY gave Miss Gorman something to remember it by—"The Golden Mermaid," a brilliant gold statue to be kept permanently by any beauty who could win it three times. Miss Gorman gratefully posted a \$5,000 bond for the honor of keeping the "Mermaid" for one year.

Herb Test's promotion grew to huge proportions within a year. Fifty-seven girls, representing nearly every state, hopefully sought the privilege of posting a \$5,000 bond for "The Golden Mermaid." During the parade, Miss Los Angeles tossed oranges to the crowd and Miss Macon kept alive the glory of Georgia by tossing peaches.

One of the 57 varieties of American femininity, Miss Mary Katherine Campbell of Columbus, Ohio, took the promoters seriously on their requirement that the "Mermaid" be won three times. She posted her bond as

winner in 1922 and again in 1923, and seemed about to go on forever—being only 17 when she won the trophy the second time. The promoters met hastily, gave Miss Campbell a replica of the "Mermaid" and told her to go home and compete no more.

Those Roaring Twenties, those days of John Held Jr. and Bootleg Gin and raccoon coats, actually produced the most modesty the pageant has seen. Girls paraded on various ocean piers and could be seen everywhere, but when it came to judging their figures, the matter became most private. Contestants, judges and chaperones repaired to the high school auditorium—with only the newspaper writers and photographers allowed as spectators—a rather overflow crowd at that, considering how dear Miss America always has been to the press.

The press had a vested interest in those days. All of the contestants

were chosen in newspaper contests in various cities and the papers filled their columns with the exploits of their local lovelies. Atlantic City never had the nation-wide attention it received as a result of Miss America in the 1921-1927 era.

Suddenly everything collapsed. The newspapers wondered who was using whom. Herb Test and the sponsors had some disagreement. Many a champion of women's rights felt bathing suit contests degraded women—and many mothers agreed on behalf of their daughters. Finally, and of most moment, the committee found itself losing money every year.

Miss America "died" between 1928 and 1935, except for an effort to revive her in 1933. Then, backed by showmen throughout the country, the pageant gained new life in 1935 and has lived on, growing stronger every year. The new backers decided the

"bathing beauty" was "passe." They sought, they said, "charm, poise, personality and talent." The fact that their Miss Americas always looked swell in bathing suits was coincidental, the promoters would have replied in case any happy photographer had wondered.

It remained for Miss Bette Cooper of Hackettstown to put Miss America right where she belonged—provided, of course, the promoters sincerely meant they were trying to promote the female of the species.

Blonde Bette, 17 years old and with wonderful dimples in her cheeks, entered a contest to choose "Miss Bertrand Island" in 1937—and to her astonishment won. That same naive amazement stuck with her through a long Saturday in Atlantic City; she was completely astounded and possibly frightened when she heard Miss Bette Cooper named as Miss America of 1937.

The next morning promoters led photographers to her hotel door, but Bette had fled back to Hackettstown. She refused to budge, to pose for pictures or to make any personal appear-

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LEFT: Pretty girls are a "must" in any shore promotion and this "publicity" picture makes it evident where eight good-looking females would like to vacation.

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ances. In June of 1941, after her graduation from Centenary Junior College in Hackettstown, Bette went on a limited tour with other Miss Americas, but her shyness kept her in the background. Now married, Bette still refuses to have anything to do with the pageant.

Bette's walkout caused a rule change—subsequent Miss Americas have had to be at least 18 years old and have had to agree to give the year of their lives after the coronation to being a Miss America at beck and call of the promoters. In return, Miss Americas in 1938 started building up cash returns for their successes. The days of amateur beauties putting up a \$5,000 bond for a cup had long since vanished.

THE show officially became "The Miss America Pageant" in 1940 and kept going throughout World War II on a much decreased scale—operating at one time on an annual \$16,000 budget. Then, in 1945, direction changed markedly. That year the Scholarship Foundation became official, with \$5,000 in the scholarship kitty.

Scholarship awards now reach all the way down to local contests and as a result thousands of young women have attended or are attending colleges and universities on scholarships related to the Miss America contest. Today more than \$150,000 in scholarships are awarded each year before the state winners compete at Atlantic City.

Atlantic City awards each year total upward of \$25,000, with a \$5,000 scholarship going to Miss America and a \$3,000 scholarship to the first runner-up. In addition, of course, Miss America indorses enough products and makes enough personal appearances to net her more than \$50,000 in the year of her reign.

THE Miss America Pageant is strictly and shrewdly run by a full-time staff. Local contests are carefully arranged and the Atlantic City finals are so full of decorum that photographers have on occasion complained

the atmosphere seemed more like that of a finishing school than a beauty contest. Last year pageant directors stuffily ordered photographers not to take pictures showing Miss America's knees during a New York interview.

Nevertheless, when Miss America and her friends appear on the front pages of papers throughout the nation in the week following Labor Day, the odds are high that the pictures will lean heavily to the bathing suit side. The magic words "Atlantic City" stand a much better chance of getting in the papers that way.

Miss America stands almost on her own today; Atlantic City probably owes her more than she owes Atlantic City. Yet she does a right good job of promoting the city where her ruling class first soared to the heights of royalty. Miss America and Atlantic City are wed for a long, long time.

Other resort towns along the New Jersey Shore use the good old bathing suit technique, officially and unofficially, to get their names before the public. Most of the queens rise to a moment of brief glory, only to disappear.

Asbury Park, once a Baby Parade center, tried Mrs. America as

a promotional gimmick but Mrs. America and her promoters moved off bodily to Florida. Now Asbury Park chooses the National College Queen as the climax to its summer season. As the publicity boys say, "she should combine a Phi Beta Kappa head with a Marilyn Monroe figure." She must prove her literacy by writing a 250-word essay on "What a College Education Means to Me." The winner is assured of scholarships and foreign cruises.

SECOND to the Miss America show in magnitude is the choice of a Miss New Jersey Seafood Princess at Point Pleasant during Big Sea Day in August. Point Pleasant revived the old-time Big Sea Day in 1950 and as a logical focal point decided to crown a Miss Seafood Princess. The fete is highly successful, with as many as 250,000 people crowding the city during the day and it's certain Miss N.J.S.F.P. is as much an attraction as the fact that Indians long ago also celebrated Big Sea Day.

Asbury Park and Point Pleasant would admit, nevertheless, that Miss America is the big, big sister—the big "older" sister, of course. This year, as the 30th queen feels the crown

nestle atop her cute head, she will be linked statistically with the ages.

She will be linked with 29 girls of the past—all of them living and all of them doing quite well as housewives and mothers and career girls. They are, as a matter of fact, living more quietly than might be expected. Many have retired completely from the public glare, eager for privacy for themselves, their husbands and children. The oldest of them is only 52, surprising when it's considered she won the crown in 1921!

A composite Miss America, boiled down from the statistics of all 29 competitors, is 5 feet, 6½ inches tall, weighs 124 pounds, has measurements of 34½-24½-35, and she averaged 19 years of age at the time she won the title. Colleen Kay Hutchins of Salt Lake City in 1952 boosted all the statistics: She was the oldest, at 25; the tallest, at 5-10; the heaviest, at 143 pounds—and the only one to exactly match the fictional 36-24-36 proportions of "ideal" womanhood.

Even now the build-up is on for the week after Labor Day. Thousands upon thousands of girls are dreaming in farmhouses and city apartments, sending in their pictures to local committees, losing a pound here or adding one there, brushing up their voices and piano fingers and dancing legs (getting talented, that is).

Every time a local queen is chosen along the Miss America trail—in Iowa or Arkansas or Florida or California—a line is apt to appear in the local paper: "She now will compete in the state contest in the hope that she will be chosen to represent her state at Atlantic City."

Just a line, just a mention. Who knows how many motorists roll into Atlantic City each year on the strength of that? None? Millions? Who knows?



Asbury Park's famed Baby Parade was two years old when this picture was taken in 1892.